

5-21-2020

## The Practice of cantus planus binatim as Reflected in John Plousiadenos's Pro-Union Communion Hymns

Simeon Brown  
simeon.brown@uconn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://opencommons.uconn.edu/gs\\_theses](https://opencommons.uconn.edu/gs_theses)

---

### Recommended Citation

Brown, Simeon, "The Practice of cantus planus binatim as Reflected in John Plousiadenos's Pro-Union Communion Hymns" (2020). *Master's Theses*. 1508.  
[https://opencommons.uconn.edu/gs\\_theses/1508](https://opencommons.uconn.edu/gs_theses/1508)

This work is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Connecticut Graduate School at OpenCommons@UConn. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of OpenCommons@UConn. For more information, please contact [opencommons@uconn.edu](mailto:opencommons@uconn.edu).

**The Practice of *cantus planus binatim* as Reflected  
in John Plousiadenos's Pro-Union Communion Hymns**

Simeon W. Brown

B.M., Baldwin Wallace University, 2018

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

at the

University of Connecticut

2020

Copyright by  
Simeon W. Brown

2020

Approval Page

Master of Arts Thesis

**The Practice of *cantus planus binatim* as Reflected  
in John Plousiadenos's Pro-Union Communion Hymns**

presented by

Simeon W. Brown, B.M.

Major Advisor \_\_\_\_\_  
Eric Rice, Ph.D.

Associate Advisor \_\_\_\_\_  
Alain Frogley, D.Phil.

Associate Advisor \_\_\_\_\_  
Jesús Ramos-Kittrell, Ph.D.

University of Connecticut

2020

The few scholars who discuss the Byzantine polyphony of John Plousiadenos (ca.1429-1500)<sup>1</sup> relate his style consistently to the practice of *cantus planus binatim*.<sup>2</sup> While modern editions of Plousiadenos's pieces as well as the subsequent analysis of his works in comparison to authentic Italian *binatim* confirm that he composed in a style akin to this note-against-note practice, musicologists have not fully explained why and where Plousiadenos would have heard this music. An understanding of Plousiadenos's polyphonic works is difficult without first understanding the origins of *binatim*, its use, its significance in the Latin church, how it was transmitted (both orally and through notation), and how Plousiadenos would have come into contact with it. After exploring these topics, I will offer an explanation as to why the composer may have chosen to incorporate the style of *cantus planus binatim* into his compositions.

The political and religious background of Plousiadenos's home island of Crete and the composer's biography (such as it is known) will serve as essential context for a discussion of his

---

<sup>1</sup> The scholarship on Plousiadenos includes Pyrros Bamichas, "Plousiadenos, Johannes," *Grove Music Online* (January 2001); Dimitri Conomos, "Experimental Polyphony, 'According to the Latins,' in Late Byzantine Psalmody," *Early Music History* 2 (1982), 1-16; Eleftherios Despotakis, "Some Observations on the Διάλεξις of John Plousiadenos (1426?–1500)," *Byzantion: Revue internationale des études byzantines* 86 (2016), 129–137; Joseph Gill, *The Council of Florence*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1959; Manoussos Manoussakas: 'Recherches sur la vie de Jean Plousiadenos (Joseph de Méthone) (1429?–1500),' *Revue des études byzantines*, vol.17 (1959), 29–49; Bjarne Schartau, "Observations on the Transmission of the Kalephonic Oeuvre of Ioannes (and Georgios) Plousiadenos," in *Tradition and Innovation in the Late and Postbyzantine Liturgical Chant*, ed. Gerda Wolfram (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2008), 129-157; Charles Yost, "Neither Greek nor Latin, but Catholic: Aspects of the Theology of Union of John Plousiadenos" *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2018), 43-59; *idem*, "The Thought and Ministry of a 'Unionist Priest': John Plousiadenos (1500), the Council of Florence, and the Tradition of Byzantine Unionism," PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> *Cantus planus binatim* was the practice of singing plainsong in improvised note-against-note counterpoint by two voices of equal ambitus. See Don Michael Randel, *The Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 146. Regarding the simultaneous singing of Byzantine neumes, see Conomos, "Experimental Polyphony," 6.

Byzantine polyphony. Following the Fourth Crusade (1204), which saw the sack of Constantinople at the hands of Western Europeans, Byzantium was divided among its victors, with Crete eventually becoming the outermost colony of the Venetian Republic.<sup>3</sup> Although the Venetians purchased the rights to the island from Boniface of Montferrat in 1204, it was not until 1211 that they gained full control of the island.<sup>4</sup> The Venetians had invaded Crete in 1207, and, after four bloody years, defeated a combined force of Genoese and Cretan defenders.<sup>5</sup> The Fourth Crusade benefitted the Venetians in other ways as well, leaving Constantinople sacked and in Latin control. Crusaders from Venice looted Byzantine cathedrals and used Greek icons from them to decorate their churches and other buildings when they returned home.<sup>6</sup> By stealing and rehousing the Byzantine spoils throughout their mother city, the Venetians were able to display their power over the once-mighty Byzantine Empire. Since Venetians controlled Constantinople, had forced its populace to convert to the Roman rite, had stolen the city's most valuable religious objects, and had acquired Crete, they saw themselves as inheritors of the Byzantine Empire, and they saw Venice as the new power of the Mediterranean.<sup>7</sup>

Cretans, however, were wary of facing the same fate as the inhabitants of Constantinople: forced conversion to the Roman rite and loss of governmental autonomy. Before the invasion, they had had a negative perception of the Venetians, associating them only with violence and subjugation. After the Venetians had taken control of the island, Cretans' fears were confirmed

---

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Gill, *Byzantium and the Papacy, 1198-1400* (New Jersey: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 1979), 25.

<sup>4</sup> David Jacoby, "Jews and Christians in Venetian Crete: Segregation, Interaction, and Conflict," *Economia e Società Nello Stato da Mar* (Nov., 2009), 239.

<sup>5</sup> Jacoby, "Jews and Christians," 239.

<sup>6</sup> Maria Georgopoulou, "Late Medieval Crete and Venice: An Appropriation of Byzantine Heritage," *The Art Bulletin* 77, no. 3 (Sep., 1995): 479.

<sup>7</sup> Gill, *Byzantium and the Papacy*, 28-33.

when the Doge of Venice established Crete as a fiefdom, transferred the ownership of land from the native population to Venetian officials, and then forced Cretans to work the land they had once owned.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the Cretan capital saw religious and cultural shifts in its identity: the Venetians changed the city's name from Chandax to Candia, its official language from Greek to Latin, and its official religion from Orthodox Christianity to Catholicism. They built new Catholic churches and appropriated existing Byzantine ones for Catholic use, stripping them of their Greek Orthodox possessions. Finally, they excluded Cretans from government.<sup>9</sup> The Cretans did not take the sudden subjugation of their culture lightly, responding with twelve armed revolts, six of which occurred during the first hundred years of the occupation.<sup>10</sup>

The Venetians allowed Cretans to follow the Eastern rite, but they stipulated that Orthodox priests on the island were under the jurisdiction of the Catholic Archbishop in Candia, whose seat was the Cathedral of St. Titus.<sup>11</sup> The Venetians feared that the Cretans could use Orthodoxy as a unifying force to revolt. To prevent this, Venetians prohibited contact between Cretan clergy and the Orthodox Patriarch in Constantinople; they subsequently expelled Cretan Orthodox priests with close ties to the city.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the Island Republic repurposed Crete's patron saint (St. Titus) for their own veneration and appropriated the *Mesopanditissa* (a Cretan icon) as a false symbol of unity. Cretans interpreted these actions as a result of papal aggression — an assertion of dominance over their Orthodox faith.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Georgopoulou, "Late Medieval Crete and Venice," 481.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 481.

<sup>10</sup> Sally McKee, *Uncommon Dominion: Venetian Crete and the Myth of Ethnic Purity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 134-135.

<sup>11</sup> Georgopoulou, "Late Medieval Crete and Venice," 481.

<sup>12</sup> Maria Georgopoulou, *Venice's Mediterranean Colonies: Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 8.

<sup>13</sup> Georgopoulou, *Venice's Mediterranean Colonies*, 8. In 1054, The Schism of 1054 separated the Eastern and Western churches and left both rites competing for ecclesiastical preeminence

This is the political context in which Plousiadenos created his late fifteenth-century polyphony, which is an interesting hybrid between Eastern and Western style. He became an ordained Orthodox priest in 1451, serving as a composer, theologian, and delegate from Crete to the venetian cardinalate.<sup>14</sup> Although in his youth he had opposed the 1439 Council of Florence, which unified the Eastern and Western churches and subsequently placed Orthodoxy under papal control, he studied carefully the acts of the Council during his time in Constantinople and grew convinced that the union was the most politically beneficial option for Crete.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Plousiadenos thought that the union left open the possibility that Latin and Greek cultures could remain intact, so that the union would not require Greeks to betray their cultural identity and its strong ties to Orthodoxy.<sup>16</sup> On this point, Plousiadenos stated that anyone who asserted the superiority of the Roman Church was akin to Judas or the crucifiers of Jesus.<sup>17</sup> By drawing this comparison, he suggested that the Roman and Greek rites were on equal ground and that neither was more pious or reverent than the other.

Along with Dimitri Conomos, I propose that Plousiadenos used music to promote these pro-union beliefs, transforming them into a performative aspect of the religious and cultural life of Crete. His two polyphonic communion verses, *Aineite ton Kyrion* (a setting of Psalm 148:1) and *O eōrakōs* (a setting of John 14:9), which also served to introduce Western polyphony into Orthodox liturgical practices, are perhaps the most striking examples of this.<sup>18</sup> The verses are

---

over the other. The Venetian's behavior toward Crete's Orthodox priests was a manifestation of this struggle. See Joseph Gill, *The Council of Florence* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 5-6.

<sup>14</sup> Charles C. Yost, "Neither Greek nor Latin, but Catholic: Aspects of the Theology of Union of John Plousiadenos," *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2018): 44.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 50. Plousiadenos states this in his *Expositio*, PG 159:1112C.

<sup>18</sup> Conomos, "Experimental Polyphony," 2.



notated in two sets of Byzantine neumes (one in black ink and the other in red) to be sung simultaneously, using a polyphonic technique similar to that of *cantus planus binatim*. As we shall see, this practice was very important to Western liturgical traditions in the late Middle Ages and early modern period.

I further argue that Plousiadenos's polyphonic Byzantine music was a means of Latinizing Crete, inviting a hermeneutical reading that sheds light on the double-binding political issues permeating a Cretan concern for cultural and historical preservation on the one hand and a Venetian concern for the stability of the West on the other. In this respect, I argue that, while the co-opting of Cretan cultural symbols and religious practices legitimized Venetian rule, the integration of Venetian customs into Cretan life also implied the necessary presence of Greek culture as a performative arena in which these customs acquired meaning. Ultimately, I propose that, while the combined effects of the Venetian occupation of Crete, the Venetians' appropriation of various aspects of Cretan culture, and the rulings of the Council of Florence did in fact lead to Plousiadenos's unique combination of Latin and Byzantine musical styles, his music hints at a rather more complex political and historical scenario than simple textual hybridity. For while the occupation gave Cretans a new political, religious, and cultural purpose, such a historical position could only be feasible — or so Plousiadenos thought — in the context of a unified Western Christianity that required Greek presence both for its political realization and for the sake of religious and political sovereignty.

### **The Origins and Tradition of *Cantus planus binatim***

*Cantus planus binatim* was a daily fixture in liturgical music throughout Europe from the late thirteenth century until 1500.<sup>19</sup> It was an improvised contrapuntal technique with a second voice that accompanied the plainchant in note-against-note counterpoint with intervals of fourths, fifths, octaves, and unisons. Due to its primitive and improvisatory style, *binatim* belongs within the larger improvised polyphonic category of *discantus simplex*, or polyphony without rhythmic division (i.e., first species counterpoint).<sup>20</sup> The earliest written forms of *binatim* have an Italian provenance and date from the late thirteenth century. These written sources come from the central regions of Italy (Lazio, Tuscany, Umbria, and Emilia), as well as the Veneto, in the northeastern part of the country. Other early sources of *binatim* come from Zara, a city that was under Venetian influence as early as the eleventh century, a fact that may suggest a Venetian origin.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, according to first-hand accounts dating from as late as 1525, standard performance practices for music, such as *cantus planus*, *alternatim*, and *cantus figuralis*, were sung at San Marco regularly.<sup>22</sup> Although it is often thought of as a major musical center, Venice was not known for its composed polyphony until the Flemish composer Adrian Willaert was appointed as *maestro di cappella* at San Marco in 1527.<sup>23</sup> Prior to Willaert's appointment, Venice's liturgical music was relatively simple, with plainchant, note-against-note counterpoint, and improvised polyphony as standard practices.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Rob C. Wegman, "What is Counterpoint?" in *Improvising Early Music*, ed. Johannes Menke and Peter Schubert (Leuven University Press, 2014), 38.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 38. It is important to note that Wegman roughly translates *cantus planus binatim* to "plainchant doubled," which properly contextualizes the simplicity of the counterpoint.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Levy, "Italian Duecento Polyphony: Observations on an Umbrian Fragment," *Rivista Italiana di Musicologia* 10 (1975), 17.

<sup>22</sup> Iain Fenlon, "St. Mark's before Willaert," *Early Music* 21, no. 4 (November 1993), 561.

<sup>23</sup> Michele Fromson, Lewis Lockwood, Giulio Ongaro, and Jessie Ann Owens, "Willaert [Vuigliart, etc.], Adrian," *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>24</sup> Fenlon, "St. Mark's," 561.

The relative simplicity of Venice's church music may be tied to a number of factors, some of which can be connected to culture and government. Chant and archaic polyphony may have persisted for so long simply due to the city's deeply rooted tradition of performing such repertory, and the rising thought among some humanists that florid polyphony was a contrived and unnatural form of musical expression, especially in context of the church. In fifteenth-century Italy, complex notated polyphony began to recede from liturgical use in small churches, but large monasteries and cathedrals, most notably institutions frequented by the pope, continued to use highly contrapuntal music in their liturgy.<sup>25</sup> As we shall see, most churches in Venice maintained a tradition of singing chant without much polyphonic elaboration. According to Iain Fenlon, simple ecclesiastical music may have served as an evocation of Venice's power during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. As early as the fifteenth century, the Veneto had begun a slow decline: territory and trade routes were taken over at the hands of the Ottoman Empire, mass death occurred due to a series of devastating plagues, and French and Spanish influence during the Italian Wars reduced Venice's influence. Certainly, by the *seicento*, the sway of the Venetian government in Italy and indeed throughout Europe had lessened noticeably. Singing in archaic, improvisatory polyphonic styles may have served as a consistent evocation of Venice's prestige in the late Middle Ages.<sup>26</sup>

As leaders of a republic rather than a monarchy, the government officials in Venice were appointed via an electoral system that ensured that no single family would hold the majority of the political power at one time. Rather, governmental and military positions were often spread

---

<sup>25</sup> Nino Pirrotta, "Novelty and renewal in Italy: 1300-1600," in *Music and culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Baroque: a collection of essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 167.

<sup>26</sup> Fenlon, "St, Mark's," 561.

across several families. This system of distributing power, along with a general culture of discouraging public displays of wealth, limited the opportunity for musical patronage and thus musical development.<sup>27</sup> Without the proper environment for patronage, liturgical music remained simple and reflected music that could be sung by clerics and priests. As Kurt von Fischer explains, archaic and modern pieces were performed during the same period, and this diversity reflects musical and social traditions that varied in different monasteries, collegiate churches, cathedrals, and private chapels. Von Fischer also notes that there is a close relationship between the musical environment of a given institution and the subsequent musical education of its members.<sup>28</sup> For example, sacred pieces composed in Florence and Padua (cities known for their French musical influence and patronage) featured new musical trends, such as de Vitry-style mensuration, isorhythmic structure, rondeau form, imitation, and the addition of a third voice. In order to perform this music effectively, singers must have had sophisticated training that reflected the music of those particular cultural centers. Conversely, more primitive musical genres, such as *binatim* and other styles based on monophony, represent music meant for traditional monastic and secular use.<sup>29</sup>

However, the primary reason that Venice's liturgical music retained an archaic character was simply one of tradition. As Giulio Cattin has remarked, Venetian church music was largely performed in collegiate churches and private chapels, conservative institutions in which a late thirteenth-century musical tradition continued to be cultivated.<sup>30</sup> It is clear from the surviving

---

<sup>27</sup> Ongaro, Selfridge-Field, and Zoppelli, "Venice," *Grove Music Online* (2001).

<sup>28</sup> Kurt von Fischer, "Sacred Music of the Italian Trecento," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 100 (1973-1974), 157.

<sup>29</sup> Von Fischer, "Sacred Music," 152-156.

<sup>30</sup> Giulio Cattin, "Church Patronage in Fifteenth Century Italy," in *Music in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Iain Fenlon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 22.

fifteenth-century choir books that practices based on existing monophony were in use and encouraged by the *mansionarii* and *chorarii*, men who had been trained in these styles since they were children. Often cathedrals and collegiate churches had choir schools that would preserve and disseminate the Church's traditional musical practices. To ensure the preservation of these practices, such institutions admitted talented boys who would be admitted as full members after completing the curriculum. These men became the next generation of teachers of grammar and chant, and they were provided income for this purpose.<sup>31</sup> Pope Eugenius IV, a Venetian, also encouraged the continuation of these traditions, delivered six bulls in an effort to establish and regulate schools of grammar and chant in Turin, Bologna, Treviso, Padua, Urbino, Verona, and even in France.<sup>32</sup> In these rulings, Eugenius was attempting to re-emphasize the use of plainchant and forms of polyphony that were dependent upon it, and he went so far as to exclude the practice of florid polyphony from his musical reforms beginning in 1437. Nino Pirrotta has suggested that the pope's rulings reflected the humanistic thought that active polyphony was "artificial" and that plainchant should be performed enthusiastically due to its venerable simplicity.<sup>33</sup>

Other papal bulls, such as *Docta sanctorum patrum* (1325) by John XXII may be responsible for the promotion of *binatim* and other forms of simple improvised polyphony. This bull called for the elimination of motet performance as part of the liturgy and the limiting of ecclesiastical polyphony to *discantus simplex* (note-against-note counterpoint, usually

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>33</sup> Nino Pirrotta, "Music and Cultural Tendencies in 15<sup>th</sup>-Century Italy," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 19, no. 6 (Summer 1966), 135.

improvised).<sup>34</sup> According to the bull, the motet's rhythmic adornments of the plainchant obscured its sanctity and made the mode unclear to those performing the liturgy. At the same time, the bull also mentions the introduction of the additional voices of *motetus* and *triplum* as negative. The texts of these additional voices, which were usually in the vernacular, had little or no relationship to the traditional antiphoner and gradual, which were of course in Latin. Pope John did allow some basic counterpoint to remain in the liturgy, provided it was sung only in pure consonances (fourths, fifths, and octaves), left the plainchant in simple rhythms, and kept the accompanying voice free from short note values and the creation of dissonance. Rob C. Wegman argues that the bull was effective in making two-voice counterpoint the foundation of all liturgical polyphony, in which *cantus planus binatim* then played a central role. He has also suggested that the practice was notated for clerics and priests who were not well versed in the rules of counterpoint. This claim fits well within the context of Venice, since the churches there did not train their singers to perform complex polyphony and advocated for the adherence to the strict rules of the bull. Unfortunately for Pope John, it was largely ineffective; measured rhythms and complex polyphony were consistently employed in the liturgy throughout the fourteenth century, with the *Messe de Tournai* and Guillaume de Machaut's *Messe de Nostre Dame*, composed in 1370, as particularly celebrated examples. It is noteworthy that the bulk of fourteenth-century complex liturgical polyphony is of French origin; in Italy, such polyphony seems to have had less currency.

Italian music theorists of the *trecento* contributed to the idea of note-against-note counterpoint as the first, fundamental step to composing complex polyphony. In his musical

---

<sup>34</sup> Wegman, "What is Counterpoint?," 33. The remainder of this paragraph is drawn from Wegman's article.

treatise from 1336, the theorist and Cistercian monk Petrus dictus Palma ocosa, wrote that in order to adorn plainchant rhythmically in a manner that he calls “flowering,” the rules of *discantus simplex* must be observed.<sup>35</sup> Throughout his treatise, Petrus attempted to adhere to the *Docta sanctorum patrum*, suggesting that whoever improvised over the plainchant should sing *discantus simplex* but should subdivide the basic rhythm and employ dissonant passing tones. In so doing, Petrus posits, adherence to the bull is still upheld, for if the “flowers” are removed, the accompaniment is simply discant.<sup>36</sup> Here, Petrus was refitting motet-styled singing to comply with rules set forth for counterpoint by Pope John XXII, solidifying the role of *discantus simplex* as the foundation of liturgical polyphony.

Furthermore, in his *Ars contrapuncti* (ca.1345), Johannes de Muris emphasized the importance of *discantus simplex* by equating it to counterpoint itself, going on to say that without the foundation of first-species counterpoint, polyphony could not be cultivated any further. In addition, the second anonymous author in what is known among historians of music theory simply as “the Berkeley manuscript” commented on the necessity of mastering *discantus simplex*. He wrote that before note values could be divided, the rules of two-voice counterpoint must be perfectly understood. During the late Middle Ages, then, note-against-note counterpoint was the cornerstone of polyphony, and without proper knowledge of its practice, “flowers,” or rhythmic divisions of the discant, should not be added. In a way, these rules of counterpoint became the prerequisite for the practice of learned and sacred music in the West and served as a guidepost of uniformity in musical life.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Wegman, “What is Counterpoint?,” 23.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>37</sup> The previous paragraph owes much to Wegman, “What is Counterpoint?”

The churches in Venice were not the only institutions that utilized archaic musical styles throughout the fifteenth century; lay confraternities often hired priests to perform plainchant during their public processions and in the celebration of their daily liturgies.<sup>38</sup> The confraternities, or *scuole*, were made up of laymen and functioned, in part, to provide spiritual, moral, and monetary support for their members, who could number up to 500 men. Each *scuola* was associated with a particular church in which it performed its various activities. Through this relationship, the *scuola* often hired the church's clergy to help with the confraternity's activities, which included gathering together for meals, prayer, and self-flagellation as well as the celebration of daily high mass, mass on feast days, and public processions.<sup>39</sup>

Among the priests' activities was the singing of liturgical chant while members of the *scuola* processed through Venice flagellating themselves as an open display of their faith.<sup>40</sup> Although the main function of the *scuola* processions was religious devotion, these public presentations became a substantial element of civic ritual. Throughout the fourteenth century, the Venetian government decreed that the *scuole*, with participation of the Doge, would make an annual procession celebrating the resilience and preservation of the Republic. The *scuola* civic processions attracted thousands of people into the streets of Venice and involved no less than 2,000 participants.<sup>41</sup> These processions, while not strictly part of the liturgy in every instance, likely saw the priests singing chant.

---

<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Glixon, "Late Medieval Chant for a Venetian Confraternity: Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, MS Lat. II, 119 (2426)," *Musica Disciplina* 49 (1995), 190.

<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Glixon, "Music at Parish, Monastic, and Nunnery Churches and Confraternities," in *A Companion to Music in Sixteenth-Century Venice*, ed. Katelijne Schiltz (Boston: Leiden Press, 2018), 48.

<sup>40</sup> Glixon, "Late Medieval Chant for a Venetian Confraternity," 195.

<sup>41</sup> Glixon, "Late Medieval Chant for a Venetian Confraternity," 194.



As in large cathedrals, performance practices in monastic and convent churches were standardized over centuries; improvised singing was part of such standardization, though documentation of it rarely survives. However, the few surviving sources imply that these practices were standard throughout Venice at least until the sixteenth century.<sup>42</sup> Regardless of musical talent, clerics were of course required to sing the daily offices; with a dearth of singers trained in complex polyphony, simple textures remained the best means of cultivating polyphony until the sixteenth century.<sup>43</sup> Small churches were unlikely to bear the cost of well-trained singers, let alone the patronage to pay for new compositions.<sup>44</sup> Besides, the new trends in composed music were not within the centuries-old Venetian tradition of singing chant and *discantus simplex*, both of which were a large part of religious life in the Island Republic.

Although polyphony in Venice remained simple and therefore archaic, occasional motets were composed in a complex style during the pre-Willaert period, and these demonstrated modern musical trends: mensuration, syncopation, imitation, florid melodic lines, and chromaticism.<sup>45</sup> Such occasional motets were often used for secular purposes and were typically performed at civic events, most notably for the inauguration of the Doge.<sup>46</sup> The text of these inauguration motets typically conflated the Doge and Saint Mark, Venice's patron saint, in order to invest him with both civic and religious power.<sup>47</sup> The tradition of occasional motets continued well into the sixteenth century, but it did not have much impact on the polyphony sung and

---

<sup>42</sup> Glixon, "Music at Parish, Monastic, and Nunnery Churches and Confraternities," 49.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

<sup>44</sup> Pirrotta, "Novelty and renewal in Italy," 168.

<sup>45</sup> Jamie Reuland, "Voicing the Doge's Sacred Image," *The Journal of Musicology* 32, no. 2 (Spring 2015), 218-225.

<sup>46</sup> Ongaro, Selfridge-Field, and Zoppelli, "Venice," *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>47</sup> Reuland, "Voicing the Doge," 204.

composed for liturgical use, as is evident from accounts describing music performed in Venetian churches during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>48</sup>

As we have seen, *cantus planus binatim* was well established by the time John Plousiadenos arrived in Venice in 1461. It is beyond question that the composer would have encountered this musical style during his time in the city. If, as I argue, he was attempting to promote his pro-unionist views in a performative manner, creating works in the style of *binatim* — a practice associated exclusively with the West in general and Venice in particular — would certainly have accomplished this for a Greek audience. In addition, both *binatim* and *cantus simplex* were promoted by at least seven papal bulls throughout the two previous centuries, and such papal approval would have resonated with any Latins who might have heard Plousiadenos's compositions. Furthermore, as Wegman argues, *binatim* was the foundation upon which complex Italian sacred polyphony was built, so that it was the first step in creating counterpoint correctly. Seen as a kind of foundational music, *binatim*'s cultural significance for this context cannot be overstated.

### ***Binatim* in Manuscripts**

At the turn of the *trecento*, *binatim* was commonly found in plainchant manuscripts (i.e., graduals, antiphoners, and missals) and was usually notated without mensural notation.<sup>49</sup> It is likely, then, that during the fourteenth century, *binatim* would have been performed in unmeasured rhythms and perhaps shared the same liturgical legitimacy as plainchant. However, in a 1404 comment on Johannes de Muris's *Libellus cantus mensurabilis*, Prosdocimus de

---

<sup>48</sup> Fenlon, "St. Mark's," 554-561.

<sup>49</sup> Kurt von Fischer, "The Sacred Polyphony," 145-147.

Beldemandis claimed that *binatim* was a “special type” of *musica plana* and was performed in a partly mensural manner. In Prosdocimus’s manuscript, *binatim* is notated with the *longa*, *brevis* and *semibrevis*; however, there seems to be no explicit mensural organization in the form of signs indicating *modus*, *tempus*, or *prolatio*.<sup>50</sup>

Other manuscripts dating from a few decades after Prosdocimus’s description of *binatim* contain pieces in fully realized mensural notation.<sup>51</sup> These sources record some important characteristics of the style: voices moving within the same range, essentially note-against-note counterpoint, voice crossing, and harmony dominated by fifths, sixths, and octaves. However, the most identifiable feature of *binatim* is the position of the plainchant in the upper voice, rendering the texture mostly homophonic and dominated by melody, features that it shares with Italian madrigals during the *trecento*.<sup>52</sup> In Vatican Ms. Urb. lat. 1419, for example, only the lower, additional voice is written out, evidently indicating that the cantus firmus was well known and did not require notation.<sup>53</sup> The lack of plainchant in this source points to *binatim* as an improvisatory practice rather than a composed one.<sup>54</sup>

*Binatim* appears to have been a very malleable technique. In 1340, Bartholus de Florentia composed a mass cycle in which he rendered the Credo in a style that combined elements of the florid madrigal and *binatim*: contrary motion and active melismas on the one hand, and voice crossing and similar ambitus on the other. During the fifteenth century, composers of *binatim*

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 147. *Binatim*’s relation to *musica plana* and *discantus simplex* (both vestiges of early chant notation and the beginning of polyphony) provides context as to why it is often referred to as “old style” especially when it is compared to the innovations of *ars nova*.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 149. Manuscripts containing *binatim* include Vatican, Ms. Urb. lat. 1419; Siena, Biblioteca comunale, Ms. H. I. 10; and Guardiagrele, Cod. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Von Fischer, “The Sacred Polyphony of the Italian Trecento,” 149.

<sup>53</sup> The practice of only notating the lower voice was an Italian custom. French sources record both the cantus firmus and the counterpoint.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 150.

began to adapt to stylistic trends such as increased contrary motion and the frequent use of parallel thirds.<sup>55</sup> These developments in *binatim* contribute to Wegman's idea that it was viewed as a foundational step upon which more complex polyphony was to be built. Composers appear to have employed *binatim* as a proving ground for new musical techniques; if contrary motion, melismatic treatment, and increased use of parallel thirds were presented in the context of a singing style — one with papal approval, no less — perhaps these new musical techniques would be readily accepted.

Although *binatim* began to appear in manuscripts during the *trecento* and persisted as a common practice in Italian (and European) churches until the beginning of the sixteenth century, it was by no means the only music that was being notated and performed. Secular genres (*caccie*, *madrigals*, and *ballate*) as well sacred ones (*masses* and *motets*) were increasingly composed with mensuration, isorhythmic structures, the application of florid vocal adornments to the *cantus firmus*, and chromatic intervals.<sup>56</sup> *Binatim* was continually used, however, even while more complex styles of polyphony were under development. The technique can even be seen at the beginning of mass sections as prefaces to sections exemplifying new compositional techniques.

Example 1: Antonio Zachara da Teramo (ca. 1355-1414), Gloria "Micinella"; transcription from Cuthbert, "Tipping the Iceberg," 54.

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>56</sup> Michael Scott Cuthbert, "Tipping the Iceberg: Missing Italian Polyphony from the Age of Schism," *Musica Disciplina* 54 (2009), 45, and von Fischer, "The Sacred Polyphony of the Italian Trecento," 52.

Et in ter-ra pax ho-mi-ni-bus bo-ne vo-lu-ta-tis.

Lau-da-mus te. Be-ne-di-ci-mus te.

Contratenor

Tenor

The work of Italian composer Antonio Zachara da Teramo (ca. 1355-1414) demonstrates how passages of *binatim* were used in large sacred compositions. Zachara's masses were among the most popular in Italy during the late *trecento*; portions of them survive in over a dozen manuscripts. A common feature of his mass music is that the opening of each work contains one of a number of simple polyphonic compositional techniques, *binatim* among them.<sup>57</sup> His Gloria "Micinella," for example, opens in a rhythmicized *binatim*: the texture is homophonic, although there is some slight syncopation in the improvisatory line (see Example 1).<sup>58</sup> After opening the piece this way, Zachara shifts to a four-voice texture and obviously mensurated rhythms. *Binatim*

<sup>57</sup> Cuthbert., 51.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 52-54. Other examples of rhythmicized *binatim* survive in Vatican 657.

is thus used as an introductory segue to passages containing more modern compositional techniques.

### **The Repertory of the Communion Verses**

An important forerunner of Plousiadenos is Manuel Gazes (d. ca. 1450?), whose polyphonic settings of Byzantine chant predate those of Plousiadenos by several decades, making his compositions the earliest known polyphonic works in the Byzantine polyphony.<sup>59</sup> Little is known of Gazes's biography other than that he was a *lampadarios* (leader of the left choir) in an as yet unknown church.<sup>60</sup> His music shares various similarities with that of Plousiadenos, probably because of their common Western influence; Gazes's music thus serves as a point of comparison for Plousiadenos's work.

Michael Adamis discovered the two-voiced communion antiphons by Gazes, both settings of the *Aineite* (see Examples 2 and 3). Like Plousiadenos, Gazes appears to have had a connection to the West. Adamis found a Cherubic hymn written in Byzantine notation in the

Example 2: Manuel Gazes (d. ca. 1450?), *Aineite* 1; Transcription from Conomos, "Experimental Polyphony," 8. same source in which Gazes's polyphonic works are found. Significantly, the Byzantine melody is a setting of the Kyrie eleison, but also contains Western text "Christe eleison," which was not part of the original Byzantine rite and had been added by the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>61</sup>

Furthermore, the scribe used unusual neumes, such as the *Dipli*, *Apoderma*, *Tzakisma*, and

---

<sup>59</sup> Michael Adamis "An Example of Polyphony in Byzantine Music of the Late Middle Ages," *Report of the Eleventh International Musicological Congress, Copenhagen, 1971*, ed. H. Glahn, S. Sorensen, and P. Ryom (Copenhagen, 1972): 737-738.

<sup>60</sup> Conomos, "Experimental Polyphony," 9.

<sup>61</sup> Adamis, "An Example of Polyphony," 737; the remainder of this paragraph owes much to Adamis's article.

The image shows a musical score for a chant setting of the Nicene Creed. It consists of three systems of two staves each. The top staff is labeled [black] and the bottom staff is labeled [red]. The first system is labeled 'mode 4 authentic' and the second system is labeled 'mode 4 plagal'. The Greek text is written below the staves. The first system has the text 'Αἰ - νῶ - τε τὸν κύ -'. The second system has the text 'ρι - ον ἐκ τῶ - ἐκ τῶν οὐ -'. The third system has the text '- πανῶν.' The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and accidentals, as well as mode markings like 'mode 4 authentic' and 'mode 4 plagal'. There are also some markings like 'a', 'b', 'c', 'd', 'e', 'f', 'g' above the staves.

*Argon*, apparently to indicate duration, which in turn suggests that the chant was a Byzantine transcription of a Western melody. Lastly, Gazes composed a chant setting of the Nicene Creed, which was traditionally sung in the Roman liturgy, but not in the Orthodox one. The text of the setting is in Greek, however, so it is difficult to say with certainty that it was performed in the Latin liturgy.

Example 3: Manuel Gazes (d. ca. 1450?), *Aineite* 2; Transcription from Conomos, “Experimental Polyphony,” 9.

The image shows a musical score for a polyphonic setting. It consists of three systems, each with two staves. The top system is labeled 'mode 4 authentic' for the upper staff and 'mode 4 plagal' for the lower staff. The first staff is marked '[black]' and the second '[red]'. The lyrics are in Greek: 'Ai - veī - - - - - τε - τὸν - κύ - - - - -', 'ρι - ον - ἐκ τῶ - - - - - χω - - - - - χω - - - - -', and 'χω - - - - - οὐ - - - - - πανῶν'. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals, with some notes marked with a 'g' or a '+' sign.

Adamis points to other aspects of Gazes’s work that are unusual for Byzantine music of the period. As with Plousiadenos’s polyphonic compositions, both of Gazes’s *Aineite* settings are in two modes: the lower voice of each one is in mode four plagal, while the upper voice is notated in mode four authentic (see Examples 2 and 3).<sup>62</sup> Adamis notes that Gazes’s harmonies are unusually consonant, with extensive parallel perfect fifths, octaves, and unisons. He employs

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 737. For an in-depth analysis of the shared modes between Gazes and Plousiadenos see Conomos, “Experimental Polyphony,” 10-11.



contrary motion and voice crossing, forms cadences on the respective finals of the modes, and consistently makes use of characteristics of each respective mode in the melody of each voice.<sup>63</sup>

Example 4: John Plousiadenos (ca. 1429-1500), *Aineite* ; Transcription from Conomos, “Experimental Polyphony,” 5.

The image displays a musical score for a polyphonic setting. It consists of three systems, each with two staves. The top system is labeled 'mode 4 authentic' and 'mode 4 plagal'. The first staff is marked '[black]' and the second '[red]'. The lyrics are in Greek: 'Αἰ - νεῖ - - - - - τε - τὸν - κύ - - - - -', 'ρι - ον ἐκ τῷ - - - - - χῶ - - - - - χῶ - - - - -', and 'χῶν - - - - - οὐ - - - - - πανῶν'. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals, with some notes marked with a 'g' or a '+' sign.

These features are also present in Plousiadenos’s *Aineite ton Kyrion* (Example 4) and *O eōrakōs* (Examples 5a and 5b). Dissonant intervals, thirds, and sixths are rarely heard, and

Example 5a: John Plousiadenos (ca. 1429-1500), *O eōrakōs*; Transcription from Conomos, “Experimental Polyphony,” 6.

<sup>63</sup> Adamis, “An Example of Polyphony,” 739.

(a)

τὸ κείμενον

mode 4 plagal



τὸ τενώρει

mode 4 authentic



perfect fourths and fifths are used almost exclusively. Voice crossing is prominent throughout the works, but Plousiadenos's approach is different: unlike Gazes's *Aineite* (Examples 2 and 3), in his setting (Example 4), Plousiadenos uses contrary motion sparingly, whereas in his *O eōrakōs* (Example 5), he employs voice crossing liberally. It is noteworthy that the voices in all three *Aineite* settings move primarily in parallel fifths, whereas the voices in *O eōrakōs* are

frequently in unison. Finally, all four pieces are homophonic.<sup>64</sup> As Adamis explains, these compositional elements are not commonplace in Byzantine compositions, suggesting a Western influence for both composers.

Example 5b: John Plousiadenos (ca. 1429-1500), *O eōrakōs*; Transcription from Conomos, “Experimental Polyphony,” 7.

(b)

τὸ τενῶρει  
mode 4 authentic

τὸ κείμενον  
mode 4 plagal

Ὁ ἐ-ω-ρα-κῶς ἐ-μὲ ἐ-ω-ρα-κε τὸν πατέ-ρα καὶ ὁ τρώ-  
γων μου τὴν σάρκα καὶ πί-νων μου τὸ αἷ-μα ἐν ἐμοὶ μέ-νει κα-  
γὼ ἐν αὐτῷ εἶ- - - - - πεν ὁ κύ-ρι- - - - - ος:

<sup>64</sup> Conomos, “Experimental Polyphony,” 10.

Dimitri Conomos was the first scholar to propose that these pieces are representative of Western improvised polyphony such as *cantus planus binatim*.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, Plousiadenos's polyphonic Communion verses are very similar to *binatim*, as they are in two parts, note against note; contain voice crossing and contrary motion; and consist primarily of fourths, fifths, and octaves (compare Example 1 to Examples 4 and 5). Most strikingly, the works of both Gazes and Plousiadenos contain the liturgical melody in the upper voice, just as is in *binatim*. Conomos notes that the lower line of Plousiadenos's works is labeled "the text," and the upper line is labeled "the tenor" in the surviving source (Mount Athos, Monastery of Docheiariou, MS 315).<sup>66</sup> Given the similarities between Plousiadenos's compositions and *binatim*, the latter's connection to Venice, and the time that the composer is known to have spent there, it is very likely that *binatim* was the style that he was attempting to replicate.

### **Plousiadenos's Pro-Union Politics**

Plousiadenos may have incorporated *binatim* into his compositions as part of an effort to uphold the short-lived union between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. Because the exact dates of Gazes's life are unknown, and his motivations for composing polyphony are unclear, Plousiadenos's *Aineite ton Kyrion* and *O eōrakōs* are likely the only Byzantine pieces that can be read as symbolizing the solidarity of the union between the two Churches.<sup>67</sup> The union and the composer's views on it were a product of the Council of Florence (1438-1439), a subject to which we now turn.

---

<sup>65</sup> Conomos, "Experimental Polyphony," 13.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>67</sup> Examples 2-5 are taken from Conomos, "Experimental Polyphony," 7-9.

The Florentine Council was attended by high-ranking delegations from the Catholic and Orthodox faiths, including Pope Eugene IV and Emperor John VIII Palaeologos.<sup>68</sup> The goal was nothing less than to reunite the Catholic and Orthodox churches after a schism that had already endured since 1054. For the Orthodox, the union would secure military aid from the papacy, which was desperately needed to support Byzantium's defense against the advancing Ottoman army.<sup>69</sup> Emperor John argued that if Eugenius did not unite with the Orthodox and provide military aid, the Ottomans would conquer Constantinople and continue into Italy and the Rhineland. If Constantinople fell, they maintained, all of Christendom would be at risk. Many Catholics were in favor of the Council well before it actually took place, and upon his election in 1417, Pope Martin V sought to consolidate papal power following decades of papal schism (1378-1417) within the Roman Catholic Church. He had seen the Florentine Council as a way to force Byzantium to submit to papal power.<sup>70</sup>

At the Council, the theological matters of discussion were the *Filioque* (the nature of the Son's relationship to the rest of the Trinity), purgatory, and the use of leavened or unleavened bread in the Eucharist.<sup>71</sup> The Byzantines could not accept the *Filioque*, which had been the chief catalyst of the schism between the Catholic and Orthodox churches in 1054.<sup>72</sup> The debates on these issues lasted for nearly a year, and when the Council convened in 1439, Emperor John ultimately decided to amend the theology of the Orthodox Church to obtain papal assistance.

---

<sup>68</sup> Deno J. Geanakoplos, "The Council of Florence (1438-1439) and the Problem of Union Between the Greek and Latin Churches," *Church History* 24, no. 4 (Dec., 1955): 324-329.

<sup>69</sup> Ihor Sevenko, "Intellectual Repercussions of the Council of Florence," *Church History* 24, no. 4 (Dec., 1955): 292-93.

<sup>70</sup> Joseph Gill, "The Greeks in the Council of Florence," *Blackfriars* 41, no. 482 (May 1960): 156.

<sup>71</sup> Joseph Gill, *The Council of Florence*, 270-272.

<sup>72</sup> Geanakoplos, "The Council of Florence," 324.

Once the union between the Latin and Greek churches had been achieved, it was believed that Christendom was safe. The Orthodox Church had submitted to Roman Catholic demands, admitting “inferiority” to the Roman Church and compromising their own doctrine in order to secure military aid to defend their capital. The Latin Church, on the other hand, established ecclesiastical authority over the Byzantine Church and solidified power for the papacy.<sup>73</sup> In essence, the union was political and not spiritual, defying the official reason for the Council, which had been to discover the truth of Christian theology.<sup>74</sup>

Sadly, the union did not last long; by the time the Byzantines had returned to Constantinople, many Greeks had already begun repudiating the theological amendments they had accepted in Florence.<sup>75</sup> The anti-unionists believed that if the Turks conquered Constantinople, it would be a consequence of altering God’s pure religion; but if the city remained in Greek hands after an Ottoman assault, it would be due to the Byzantine adherence to Orthodoxy. Ultimately, the Greeks decided to repudiate the Council’s agreement, break the union, and lose papal support — all in the name of the Orthodox Church. The Greeks’ loss at the Battle of Varna in 1444 cemented Byzantium’s fate, and within ten years, the Ottomans had sacked Constantinople and ended the Byzantine Empire.

The unification of the two Christian churches had been a beacon of hope for Constantinople and for Crete. Plousiadenos was eager for the Orthodox Church to uphold the Florentine Council’s rulings, even after Constantinople fell in 1453, and his writings indicate his belief in the union’s possibilities, which were represented in his own biography. For Plousiadenos, the union was not just a political means to an end; rather, it was a true

---

<sup>73</sup> Geanakoplos, “The Council of Florence,” 328.

<sup>74</sup> Sevenko, “Intellectual Repercussions,” 295.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

reconciliation between cultures and a question of both cultural presence and historical permanence that placed Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians on equal ground. His polyphonic communion verses can thus be seen as a musical manifestation of this rapprochement, since they blend Eastern and Western compositional techniques that symbolized the possibility of Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics worshipping together as one church. Just as Plousiadenos wrote “Latinized” sermons extolling Catholic concepts when he was ministering to his flock, it is probable that he intended the communion verses to be sung as similarly Latinized music during communion — the most sacred portion of the mass.<sup>76</sup> In doing so, Plousiadenos was fulfilling the promise of the union and attempting to bridge the chasm that separated Byzantine and Roman Catholic Christians.

The composer encouraged Cretans not to reject Catholicism on the basis of its Roman origins, but to accept it for its holistic and open-minded theology.<sup>77</sup> He noted that since faith is not piecemeal, but comprehensive, theology should not be Latin or Greek, but simply Christian. In this sense, it was only logical in his mind that Orthodox Christians accept Catholic theology (including the *Filioque*, purgatory, and unleavened bread), because it is a part of the larger canon of Christian beliefs that transcend Orthodox or Roman Catholic precepts. He drew a similar parallel with the Eucharist. Although the Orthodox and Catholic rites use leavened and unleavened bread, respectively, they both accomplish the same goal. Plousiadenos argues on matters of historical fact that Jesus would have broken unleavened bread, he nonetheless claims that the Eucharist as the Body of Christ transcends Byzantine and Latin liturgies. Because Catholicism was now composed of both Greeks and Latins, the bread used was one and the

---

<sup>76</sup> Yost, “Neither Greek nor Latin,” 49.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

same, and Orthodox worshippers did not lose their identity by using unleavened bread. The same principle can be applied to the communion verses: although they now contained Western as well as Eastern elements, they continued to serve the same function and thus transcended any difference between rites. Plousiadenos believed that Catholicism was the natural progression of Orthodoxy, and that the union of both churches provided the opportunity for peace, equality, and unity.

On one hand, his polyphonic works were a manifestation of his beliefs that the union stood for equality between the Byzantine and Roman Catholic rites. Because he combined compositional techniques from both musical traditions in his settings of *Aineite ton Kyrion* and *O eōrakōs*, Plousiadenos was able to exemplify those convictions. On the other hand, however, his pieces could have been a symbol of a conflated Venetian-Cretan identity, one that served to represent Venice's full colonization of the island. As noted above, the Venetians appropriated the *Virgin Mesopanditissa*; in fact, parallels can be drawn between the icon and Plousiadenos's polyphony.

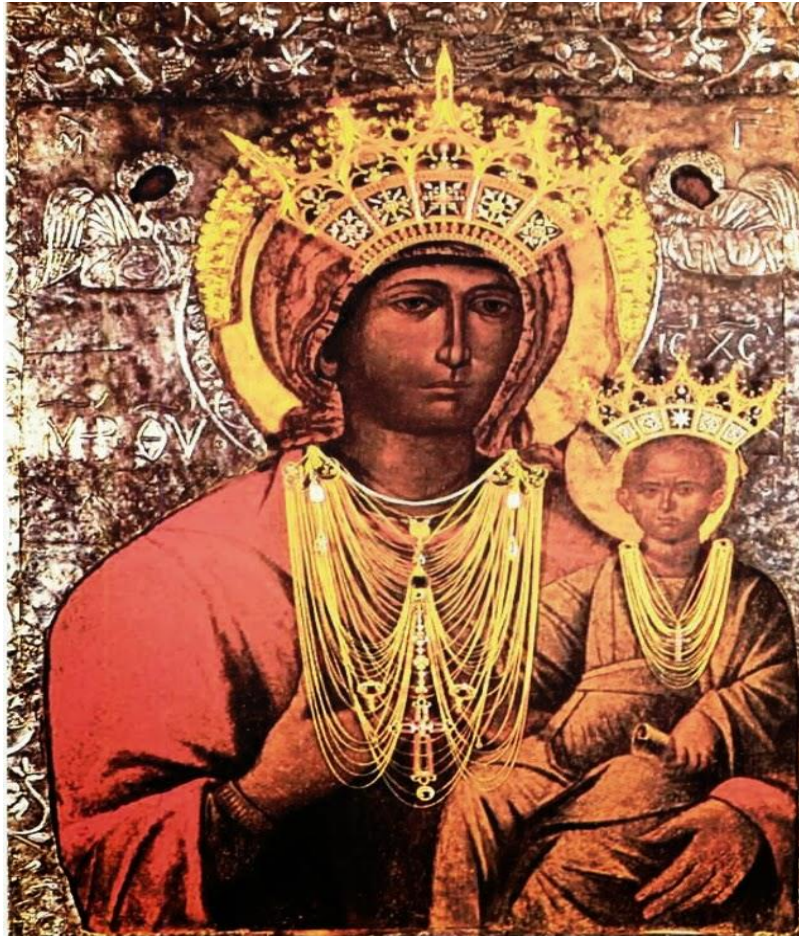
The *Mesopanditissa* is a painting that depicts the Virgin Mary holding Christ. It was hailed for its power to cause miraculous healings and was the island's most popular relic.<sup>78</sup> Venetians took advantage of Greek veneration of this icon (and Cretan religious culture, for that matter) for political purposes. Following peace negotiations between Cretan rebels and the Venetians in 1264, the latter organized a procession of the *Mesopanditissa* throughout Candia that included Orthodox and Catholic worshippers. By incorporating this holy icon in a procession that represented peace, the Venetians suggested that the peace was divinely inspired — indeed caused — by the presence of the *Mesopanditissa*. Since Venetians had convinced the rebels to

---

<sup>78</sup> Georgopoulou, "Late Medieval Crete and Venice," 487-88.



surrender, orchestrated the procession, and incorporated the icon into their own imagery, they became directly linked with the *Mesopanditissa* and therefore positioned themselves as being God's ambassadors of peace. In doing so, they associated themselves with an object of Cretan



Anonymous, *Virgin Mesopanditissa* (ca. 1100);  
Venice, Santa Maria della Salute.

culture and demonstrated their ability to infiltrate Cretan life. Furthermore, the icon henceforth represented the coexistence of Catholic and Orthodox Christianity and was now associated with Venetian rule. The *Mesopanditissa* was no longer a symbol of Orthodoxy in Crete.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> Georgopoulou, "Late Medieval Crete and Venice," 488.

By the mid-fourteenth century, the Venetians held weekly processions of the icon that visited Catholic and Orthodox churches throughout Candia to demonstrate unity. For their part, Orthodox priests refused to participate in the processions because of the implied religious subordination to the pope.<sup>80</sup> If the Orthodoxy willingly cooperated with the Catholic appropriation of an icon that was historically Byzantine, they were in effect accepting a position inferior to the Catholics by acknowledging their lack of autonomy. However, Venetians secured Orthodox participation by imposing the payment of four *hyperpera* for every procession that a priest missed. Since the Venetians demanded Orthodox participation, each procession “represented the icon as an indispensable divine agent in the establishment and perpetuation of colonial concord,” as Maria Georgopoulou has put it. This meant that Orthodox cooperation, through the conflation of the Byzantine icon with Venetian-Cretan identity and unity, was a condition for the enforcement of peace in the future.

Plousiadenos’s music functioned in the same way as the icon. Just as the Venetians had inserted themselves into something as distinctly Cretan as the *Mesopanditissa*, their foreign polyphony had infiltrated the monophonic Byzantine chant of their liturgy. By changing the characteristics of Byzantine chant through the addition of polyphony, the Venetians attempted to recast the chant’s cultural significance as Venetian — a unidirectional act of power. Yet this act had the opposite effect. Venetian polyphonic practices were combined with Byzantine liturgical music, and through this act, Venetians implicitly endorsed an affiliation between God and Venice that, although conceived as a display of hegemony, was dependent on Orthodox complicity for its effectiveness. In his writings, Plousiadenos expressed a belief that the Orthodox rite was as valid as the Roman; thus, he exhorted Orthodox Christians to embrace the

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 488-489.

Roman version, implying this symbiotic unity.<sup>81</sup> His polyphonic communion verses are perfect examples of this symbiosis.

How, then, was his pro-union music perceived? Although there is no known record of this music's reception, there are clues of a possible answer. The most important of these are reactions by some of Plousiadenos's contemporaries to his conversion to Roman Catholicism. In 1461, the composer presented himself before the Venetian senate to ask for financial support for himself and eleven of his fellow Cretan Catholic priests. They had been living in poverty because the Orthodoxy had convinced the laity to shun them, thus depriving the priests of remuneration for providing the sacraments.<sup>82</sup> Since the anti-unionist Mark Eugenikos (1392-1444) claimed that converting to Catholicism was a betrayal of Greek identity and referred to the Greeks who did convert as "half-breed man like the mythical centaurs," it is reasonable to assume that Orthodox Cretans did not appreciate Plousiadenos's polyphony. In this sense, it is possible that the Orthodox even considered Plousiadenos's music to be a surrender of their culture to the Venetians. To some of his contemporaries, evidence that Plousiadenos had become Latin-minded — leading to a loss similar to the Latinization of Chandax — was clear in that he had begun to Latinize Byzantine liturgy. Although Plousiadenos's conversion caused his fellow Cretans to see him as a traitor to Byzantine culture, it did place him in good standing with the Catholic church and Venetian government. In the years following Plousiadenos's conversion, Cardinal Bessarion selected him to be vice-*protopapas* in the Orient. The composer spent over two decades studying and working in Venice, and he was eventually elected as the Bishop of Methone.<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> Yost, "Neither Greek nor Latin," 58.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

<sup>83</sup> Conomos, "Experimental Polyphony," 2.

## Conclusion

How was Plousiadenos's music understood by Venetians and Cretans? For the Catholics, Plousiadenos's polyphonic settings of Byzantine chant symbolized the Latinization of Crete and the successful appropriation of Byzantine liturgy. Just as the Venetians had conflated a Cretan icon, the *Virgin Mesopanditissa*, with Venetian identity and unity in order to enforce and manufacture peace, Byzantine liturgy had become infused with Western elements that demonstrated Venetian colonial power and affiliated God with Venice. The Cretans likely saw Plousiadenos's music similarly, but from a negative perspective. Much as Plousiadenos's conversion to Catholicism was seen as a betrayal of Greek ethnic identity and an example of the Venetians' ability to abuse Cretans into submission, his polyphony was likely seen as a surrender of the Byzantine rite. His music was likely a representation of his efforts to uphold the union between the Roman and Orthodox Churches, and the most effective way to do this was to combine elements of the liturgical practices of both. From his writing, it is clear that Plousiadenos believed that the union would maintain Greek identity, bring peace between Venetians and Cretans, and provide stability to Christendom. In essence, his polyphonic compositions represented Byzantine-Catholic identity, unity, and peace. Yet most importantly for Plousiadenos, the union — as exemplified in his compositions — implied the possibility that Greek culture could exist within the Roman Catholic West.



## Bibliography

- Adamis, Michael. "An Example of Polyphony in Byzantine Music of the Late Middle Ages." *Report of the Eleventh International Musicological Congress, Copenhagen, 1971*, ed. H. Glahn, S. Sorensen, and P. Ryom (Copenhagen, 1972): 737-747.
- Bamichas, Pyrros. "Plousiadenos, Joannes." Grove Music Online, September 03, 2014; Accessed 17 March. 2020.
- Cattin, Giulio. "Church Patronage in Fifteenth Century Italy." In *Music in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, edited by Iain Fenlon, 21-36. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Conomos, Dimitri. "Experimental Polyphony, 'According to the ... Latins' in Late Byzantine Psalmody." *Early Music History* 2, (1982): 1-16.
- Cuthbert, Michael Scott. "Tipping the Iceberg: Missing Italian Polyphony from the Age of Schism." *Musica Disciplina* 54 (2009): 39-75.
- Fenlon, Iain. "St. Mark's before Willaert." *Early Music* 21, no. 4 (November 1993): 546-548, 552, 554-558, 560-563.
- Fischer, Kurt von. "Sacred Music of the Italian Trecento." *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 100 (1973-1974): 143-157.
- Geanakoplos, Deno J. "The Council of Florence (1438-1439) and the Problem of Union Between the Greek and Latin Churches." *Church History* 24, no. 4 (Dec. 1955): 324-346.
- Georgopoulou, Maria. "Late Medieval Crete and Venice: An Appropriation of Byzantine Heritage." *The Art Bulletin* 77, no. 3 (Sep. 1995): 479-496.
- . *Venice's Mediterranean Colonies: Architecture and Urbanism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Gill, Joseph. "The Greeks in the Council of Florence." *Blackfriars* 41, no. 482 (May 1960): 155-164.
- . *The Council of Florence*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1959.
- Glixon, Jonathan. "Late Medieval Chant for a Venetian Confraternity: Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, MS Lat. II, 119 (2426)." *Musica Disciplina* 49 (1995): 189-225.
- . "Music at Parish, Monastic, and Nunnery Churches and Confraternities." In *A Companion to Music in Sixteenth-Century Venice*, edited by Katelijne Schiltz, 45-78. Boston: Leiden Press, 2018.

- Jacoby, David. "Jews and Christians in Venetian Crete: Segregation, Interaction, and Conflict." *Economia e Società Nello Stato da Mar* (Nov. 2009): 237-272.
- Levy, Kenneth. "Italian Duecento Polyphony: Observations on an Umbrian Fragment." *Rivista Italiana di Musicologia* 10 (1975): 10-19.
- McKee, Sally. *Uncommon Dominion: Venetian Crete and the Myth of Ethnic Purity*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.
- Ongaro, Giulio, Elanor Selfridge-Field, and Luca Zoppelli. "Venice." *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 17 March. 2020.
- Owens, Jessie Ann, Michele Fromson, Lewis Lockwood. "Willaert [Vuigliart, etc.], Adrian." *Grove Music Online*. 2001 Access 17 March. 2020.
- Pirrotta, Nino. "Music and Cultural Tendencies in 15<sup>th</sup>-Century Italy." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 19, no. 6 (Summer 1966): 127-161.
- . "Novelty and renewal in Italy: 1300-1600," in *Music and culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Baroque: a collection of essays*, 80-112. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- Randel, Don Michael. *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Reuland, Jamie. "Voicing the Doge's Sacred Image." *The Journal of Musicology* 32, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 189-245.
- Sevenko, Ihor. "Intellectual Repercussions of the Council of Florence." *Church History* 24, no. 4 (Dec. 1955): 291-323.
- Wegman, Rob C. "What is Counterpoint?." In *Improvising Early Music*, edited by Johannes Menke and Peter Schubert, 9-68. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014.
- Yost, Charles C. "Neither Greek nor Latin, but Catholic: Aspects of the Theology of Union of John Plousiadenos." *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2018): 43-59.